

## What Lays Beyond the Darkness

by Cykeclops

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Summary: Locke Cole realizes that he has been selfishly kept Rachel alive. Now he must give his pain and Rachel closure.

## What Lays Beyond the Darkness

"What Lays Beyond the Darkness"

> A Tale of Locke Cole and Celes Chere of Final Fantasy VI<br> By

Kari Retzlaff

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> <font>Darkness. What lays beyond the darkness? Is it heaven? The sweet sound of angelic wings beating in motion with the pulse of a heavenly chorus? Or, perhaps, the rhythmic flapping is not from a soaring cherubim from the heights of heaven, but a fallen angel from the depths of hell. Most believe it is hell, after all, where else do nightmares emerge?

> <br> Celes Chere shuddered as an ominously cool breeze blew through the foreboding forrest that even her and her silent partner's crackling fire did not seem fend off. She quietly arose from her seat on a fallen log and threw a few more pieces of wood on the fire. Her compatriot, Locke Cole, seemed to be ever lost in thought. Which was a state, she mused, that anyone rarely found him in.

> <br> A few more silent moments passed and she wished she could say something to bring him out of his pondering. She hated to interrupt him, but if she sat one more moment in silence, she swore she would go insane. Boredly, she picked up an old piece of flint and launched it into the fire causing an explosion of suit and flame to arise. Noticing that it hadn't even phased him, she rolled her eyes and gave an exasperated sigh.

> <br> "Locke. . ."

> <br> There was no response. She crossly crossed her legs and gave him a pointed look. Given her once status as a General, Celes Chere detested being ignored. "Locke!"

> <br> The young man still continued to stare off into the darkness of the haunting woods around them. Celes crossed her arms, shooting Locke dark looks every few minutes. Who was she kidding? Even when he

was aware, he still didn't notice her the way she wanted him to. She continued to stare at him crossly until her face lit up knowingly. An evil smirk appeared on her face. "Hey! Thief!" She shouted across the campfire, immediately catching the young man's attention.

> <br> "THAT'S TREASURE HUNTER!!" He shouted instinctively. He shook his head a few times, trying to shake the cobwebs out of his head.

"Err. . .Heh. Sorry, Celes." He blushed furiously.

> <br> Celes smirked victorious as she leaned toward Locke. "Locke, remind me of what we are doing in the middle of this ghastly forrest." She leaned back against the log and placed her hands behind her head, annoyed. "I believe you owe me an explanation after I followed you with no more than a 'Celes, come on. I have to make a really important trip.'" She gave him an exhasperated sigh as she watched him closely through the fire, trying to read his expression.

> <br> "Celes. . ." He began in a low, weak whisper that immeadiately arosed her concern. "I needed to let it go. . ."

> <br> The silence of eternity is felt when two friends meet not along the road of similar thought."Locke, you are not making any sense. Let what go?" Celes leaned in closer. Her first inclination was to think of some poor animal he had befriended and taken along with him. As she was about to remark upon Locke's new found philanthropy, she found herself lost in the flames reflecting on his brown hair and pale face, and remembering how much he reminded of her of the day he burst into her cell to rescue her. Her knight in shining armor.As she continued to searched the deep crevices of pain within his face, she realized that he was speaking of something far greater than any animal.

> <br> Locke felt his gut tie itself into knots as he felt Celes's eyes upon him. He didn't want to have to say it again. Saying it to the old man back in Kohlingen . . .saying it while Rachel lay there asleep. . .was hard enough. He didn't want to reopen the wound he had sewn together with the disillusionment of protecting women. He had wanted to protect her. And. . .he had failed her.

> <br> "Locke?" She asked quietly, making her way across the campsite to sit by his side.

> <br> "Celes. . . .I--" He sighed reluctantly. "He slowly turned away from her, glancing up at the stars as if they would give him an answer. "--I realized that the only reason I wanted to keep Rachel alive for so long was. . .because of selfish reasons." He paused, taking a few moments to recollect himself. "She should have died in that cave. The only thing that was keeping her from going to paradise was me." His voice cracked. He had buried all of this so long ago, and now it all threatened to come bubbling forth. He wished he could bury it again. He wished he could forget, but if he intended to lay Rachel to rest, he needed to let her memory rest as well.

> <br> "Locke. . ."Celes began softly, trying to find comforting words. "Love is a lot like selfishness." She paused, taking a moment to glance up at the stars." I believe. . .that. . .if love were not selfish, we would not be content in loving just one person." As she finished, she inwardly kicked herself, realizing how true the statement was between herself and Locke. Was it wrong to want Locke and want to be his only one while Locke was grieving before her about a previous love?

> <br> Her thoughts were quickly interrupted by Locke's outburst. "You don't understand, Celes." He sighed as he got up. " If it wasn't for me being selfish treasure hunter in the first place, Rachel would have never been in that mine!!!" His eyes were dull as he turned to face her. " I decided. . .I needed to let it go," he paused,". . .let her go."

> <br> "But Locke--" She insisted.  
> <br> "Its true,Celes." He sighed as he placed his hands upon his knees and retook his seat upon the rotten log. "And that's why we're here. The ghost train station is about two hundred yards away from here."He recited mechanically." The old man you met back in Kohlingengave me his word that he would remove the flowers at exactly 3 AM three days after we left. . ." His voice, which had started at a dull roar, had now dwindeled to a whisper.  
> <br> Celes absently glanced at her watch."That's only about fifteen minutes from now..." She spoke softly.  
> <br> Locke nodded affirmatively. "I just. . .this was something that needed some closure. . ."Rachel needed some closure. I just. . .wanted to be there when she. . . you know. . ."  
> <br> Celes nodded as she absently slipped her hand atop of his cold and clammy hand, and the two of them sat there in silence for several minutes, lost within their own thoughts. Lost within his own sea of thoughts, Locke feared he might drown. He remained anchored to reality by the warm caress of Celes Chere's hand atop his own, and he was once again reminded of why he did not wish to make this trip alone.  
> <br> "I suppose we should get started?" Celes spoke, finally breaking the silence.  
> <br> "Yeah, I guess." Locke sighed as he slung his backpack over his shoulder. "Listen Celes, you don't have to come if you don't--"  
  
> <br> "Locke. . ."She sighed. "I know how much Rachel meant to you. . ." She struggled to find the correct words to describe her feelings. " I. . . couldn't let you face this alone."  
> <br> A small, familiar smirk finally graced his lips as he confidently pushed his bangs out of his face. "Thanks, Celes."With a confident smile, Celes Chere took the first step into the darkness. Locke quietly followed in pursuit, and then took the lead.  
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Ten minutes left and all Locke could concentrate on was Rachel's face that seemed to elude him in the darkness. He scanned the darkness, trying to find her memory. . .trying to find a glimpse of her face at her finest. All he could see in the contemplative substance of the darkness was her pain-etched expression as she fell upon the rocks below the broken bridge. Deep within himself, he knew that her death was not his fault, but he could not help, but feel responsible. Now, he felt responsible for Celes. Responsible. . .that word has a lot of connotations beyond its denotation. What did responsibility mean to him? Was it. . . .beyond protect--

> <br> "Locke! Watch out!!" Locke was sudden awakened from his daze. He looked up to find a pack of red wolves standing before him. The three wolves began to circle their prey, looking for an opportune moment to strike. Locke instinctively backed to where Celes was standing with her sword in hand. Locke drew his own knife. The reflection of the moonlight against the blade of Locke's knife alerted the leader of the pack. He slouched backwards, barring his teeth while saliva dripped in anticipation. There was seven minutes until Rachel boarded the train.

> <br> The first wolf sprung from the left, and Celes barely sidestepped the lunging wolf, letting it tumble the side. The second leapt at Locke, knocking him off of his feet. The wolf growled as it triumphantly stood atop Locke's chest. Saliva slipped down into

Locke's wide eyes, causing him to be momentarily blinded. As he blinked the irritation away, Locke could barely make out the forms of the approaching K-9's to his throat. In a wild trash, Locke swung his knife in an arc, slicing a large gash on the animals jaw. It retreated instinctively, giving Locke just enough time to roll to the side. He quickly bounded to his feet. Five minutes left.

> <br> Celes Chere took a battle stance, delivering a sharp kick to one of the approaching dogs. It whimpered as the kick solidly connected with the animal. Momentarily distracted by Locke's attack, the third wolf lunged. Celes barely had enough time to throw her arm up in defense as the dog's teeth sliced it up open. The dog licked its bloody chops as Celes held her bloody arm close to her. In retaliation, she managed to fire off a bolt 2 spell. The beast died instantly. Four minutes left.

> <br> Locke quickly side stepped the leaping K-9, slashing it across its length as it flew past. The wolf skidded to a stop on its side and rested there, unmoving. Three minutes left.

> <br> The remaining wolf snarled at the duo and then retreated back into the woods. Locke then noticed the pool of blood at Celes's feet. "Celes! Are you all right?!!" Locke asked frantically as he grabbed her by the shoulders.

> <br> "Yes, Locke, I'll be fine, but--" The sound of mechanical gears squealing as they grinded to a stop interrupted Celes. "--But Locke! The train!" Locke looked frantically back and forth between the direction of the train and his wounded friend, torn. Celes roughly grabbed him with her good arm and jerked him in the direction of the sound. "Come on, Locke!!"

> <br> Locke stared at her for a moment, but then quickly pursued. The two began to race through the forrest, Celes clutching her wounded arm as branches continued to assault their faces. Locke wasn't sure how much time had elapsed since their battle had begun, but at the moment, he did not care. The feeling struck him as odd as he continued to run. He was more concerned with Celes's safety than telling Rachel good bye.

> <br> A hiss of air reverberated through the air as the two raced up the old rotten, wooden, stairs of the old train station. As they reached the top of the platform, Locke's eyes suddenly filled with tears as he watched the train begin to leave the station. He watched dejectedly as the last cars slowly left the platform. As he began to look away, Celes pointed to a small, feminine figure leaning on the rusted railing of the caboose. With a smile on her face, Rachel gestured to Celes and nodded acceptingly as if to acknowledge their unspoken love. She then took one more longing look back at Locke for one last time as she blew him her final kiss to the man she loved.

> <br> The train slowly faded into the foggy night, leaving Locke to stare at the murkiness that his lover had since disappeared from. The hole in his heart, though, quickly mended as he finally accepted the closure that both he and Rachel so desperately needed. As he turned around, he closed his eyes and when they fluttered open, he was greeted by sight of Celes.

> <br> "--Locke?" She asked timidly.

> <br> "I'm fine, Celes. Really." He nodded satisfactorily. "Its just over now. . .and. . .I just wanted to thank you." Locke looked past Celes for a moment contemplatively.

> <br> ". . .for what, Locke?" She tilted her head curiously, running over several things that she might have done that he would be thanking her for.

> <br> Locke softly leaned across the distance between them and lightly kissed her on the cheek. "For helping me over come my past."

He whispered.

> <br> "Vaaaoooo! Locke score!!"

> <br> "Gau!!" Celes screamed. Both of them blushed furiously. "What in the world are you doing here?!!" Celes demanded, more embarrassed than angry.

> <br> "Gau follow thief and Celes when they go. Gau think they need help." He dropped down from his perch high within the train station and landed with a thud. "Celes hurt." Gau looked at the wound with a childlike fascination. "Celes need help."

> <br> The red flush upon Locke's cheeks slowly faded away to a look of concern as he studied the wound himself. "Yeah, Gau's right. We need to get you to a hospital. . . AND THAT'S TREASURE HUNTER!!"

> <br> Celes smirked and then looked down at her wound. "Yes, I suppose that would be wise. . ." She looked at the blood-soaked, makeshift bandage. Celes glanced at Locke and then back at Gau embarrassedly.

> <br> "No worry! Gau no tell." Gau winked at Celes mischievously.

> <br> Celes and Locke exchanged knowing looks before they both nodded to Gau as if to seal the pact. "Right." Locke sighed exhausted. "Let's--Let's just go home."

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